

Brother Knows Best by Ellie603

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Summary:

After the Snow Ball, Dustin reflects on the changes happening in the lives of he and his friends, and realizes that he doesn't have to figure everything out on his own anymore; he finally has an older brother to go to for advice... or whatever else Steve Harrington's good for.

Brother Knows Best

Author's Note:

This is the first of eleven stand alone(ish) one-shots that each focus on one of the main characters in the year or so after season 2. There will guaranteed be a ton of Steve Harrington being a really great older brother and lots of cute teenagers in love (and eventually it's going to just be all Joyce/Hopper, so stay tuned).

I just really really love Steve and Dustin's relationship, so it seemed like a nice starting point for this.

Enjoy!

After the Snow Ball ended, the whole group of middle schoolers left the gym together, waving at Nancy and Jonathan who were staying behind to clean up.

Dustin's momentarily damaged confidence had been buoyed by his dance with Nancy and the entire group had been beyond excited at the appearance of El, Mike more than anyone of course. The group had barely seen their friend since the night she had closed the gate and saved Hawkins, so just sitting around drinking punch and talking loudly over the music had been enough.

Outside, the group found Mrs. Byers and Hopper waiting for them, along with an angry but subdued Billy on the other side of the parking lot, glaring at Lucas and Max's intertwined hands.

"I'll see you guys at the arcade tomorrow," Max said, fear of her brother no longer present in her voice after the night at the Byers' house. She kissed Lucas on the cheek quickly and then ran away before the others could say anything about it.

"Lucas has a giiiirlfriend," Dustin teased, laughing as Lucas ducked his head into his coat.

“Mike and El are literally standing right there holding hands!” Lucas jabbed his finger accusatorily at their friends.

“Girl... friend?” El asked Mike, pointing to herself, her face curving up into a smile as though she already knew what Lucas was talking about.

“Yeah,” Mike replied staring back at El lovingly. “You’re my girlfriend. I mean, if you want to be.”

El smiled at Mike and kissed his cheek just like Max had done to Lucas. “Girlfriend,” she repeated in confirmation.

Dustin rolled his eyes. If had to deal with this every time the group saw El then he really wasn’t sure how he was going to survive the rest of middle school, let alone high school.

“Okay that’s enough of that.” Hopper stepped in to separate Mike and El.

Mike sprung away from his girlfriend sheepishly, though El only smiled up at her adopted father.

Dustin snickered.

“In the car, boys.” Mrs. Byers inclined her head to the vehicle behind her, amusement on her face at the chief’s response to the budding young romance before them.

Mike steeled himself and then moved past Hopper to give Eleven one last hug.

Hopper rolled his eyes but allowed it for a couple seconds.

“I’ll see you soon, okay?” Mike said, his eyes locked onto those of El.

“Promise?” El asked, turning her head so the question was directed not at her boyfriend but at her adopted father.

Hopper sighed. “Yeah, I promise, kid. Now let’s get moving.”

Lucas, Will, and Dustin called out their goodbyes to El and filed into

Mrs. Byers's car, Dustin having to literally drag Mike along with them so he wouldn't stand in the parking lot staring after his girlfriend.

"So it looks like you guys had fun?" Mrs. Byers asked the gang of boys in her back seat.

"Will danced with Sarah Miller," Dustin sing-songed from where he sat between Mike and Lucas.

"Dustin, shut up!" Will complained from the front seat, turning around to whack Dustin's leg, the only part of him he could reach.

"Oh?" Mrs. Byers was clearly tempering her excitement. "How was that?"

Will shrugged. "Alright I guess. It was more fun getting to hang out with El and stuff though."

Lucas and Dustin quickly registered their agreement, Mike too lost in staring out the window to comment.

Mrs. Byers smiled. "That's great." She glanced back in the rearview mirror. "You dance with anyone, Dustin?"

Dustin shrunk back in his seat slightly. "Nancy Wheeler," he replied, trying to sound casual.

Mrs. Byers laughed kindly. "That must have been fun."

Dustin thought for a moment. "Yeah, it was. She's a good dancer. And she told me that I'm her favorite."

That comment got everyone's attention. Even Mike jerked out of his stupor and turned to Dustin skeptically.

"Hey! She did!" Dustin held up his hands to defend himself from Nancy's brother. "She said that out of all your friends that I've always been her favorite."

Will laughed and turned back around in the front, but Dustin heard Lucas mutter to himself that he'd "see about that."

The conversation soon shifted to the movie they were going to watch at Will's that night, Mike now fully engaged in the discussion, though every so often Dustin could see him slip away into what Dustin assumed was some romantic daydream featuring their telekinetic friend.

Movie night was always an exciting affair for the boys, and this evening proved no different as they covered the floor with pillows and Mrs. Byers made them popcorn. Dustin could see that Mrs. Byers didn't want to leave Will, but eventually she went to her room, calling out for them to try to fall asleep at a decent hour as though she was going to bed, though Dustin knew that she wouldn't be asleep for hours and that her bedroom door would stay open the whole night so she could hear if something happened.

This was the first time the boys had stayed over at the Byers' since the night in November when everything had happened. No one had left the house that night except a very injured Steve and the chief who drove him to the hospital.

After Dustin, Steve, and the other kids had set fire to tunnels and then escaped the demo-dogs, they had gone back to the Byers's house to wait for everyone else to get back. Steve had been conscious, but he was definitely crashing after being beaten to a pulp by Billy Hargrove and then running for his life.

The kids had set Steve on the couch and dragged Billy outside where he seemed to come to after a moment, and he had driven off before anyone else returned.

Hopper and Mrs. Byers had arrived soon after, Hopper carrying Eleven and Jonathan carrying Will. Mike had jumped up to see El, but the others had stayed around Steve on the couch where he seemed to be far more exhausted than he had let on down in the tunnels.

"Hop, I think he needs a doctor," Joyce had said after running over to examine the beaten teenager in her living room, Nancy trailing in her wake as Jonathan took Will back to his room.

The police chief had nodded and set Eleven down on the sofa, pulling

Steve up instead.

The kids had immediately raced to tell Hopper and Joyce what had happened, all of them stumbling over each other.

The adults had quickly gotten the gist of Billy's attack, and Hopper had helped Steve to the cruiser, leaving behind Joyce, Nancy, and the kids, all looking worried.

Nancy had broken the phone earlier to try and stop Will from knowing where they were, so Lucas had borrowed Will's walkie talkie to get in touch with his sister who was annoyed at Lucas's calling but who eventually did get his mom so Lucas could ask her to call Mrs. Henderson and the Wheelers to let them know that Mike and Dustin were both with him at the Byers's but the phones were down. The group figured they'd let Billy deal with letting Max's parents know where she was.

The group had finally fallen asleep, collapsed on any pillows and blankets Mrs. Byers could find, all thrown haphazardly over the still-drawing covered floors.

Eventually Hopper had returned, now without Steve, only Dustin waking up to see the chief come through the door.

"What happened?" Dustin had sprang up immediately. "Is Steve okay?"

Hopper had seemed torn between annoyance, exhaustion, and relief. "Yeah, he's gonna be fine, kid. He's got a concussion and some pretty nasty cuts and bruises, but he'll be fine."

Dustin let out a sigh of relief, but then grew confused. "Is he all alone at the hospital?" he asked.

Hopper offered a small smile, letting Dustin see through some of the cracks in his hard exterior. "His parents were on a business trip, but they'll be with him in an hour or two. And the nurses are gonna take good care of him."

"Oh thank God," Mrs. Byers had come in without them noticing and was now leaning back against the wall.

“Will okay?” Hopper asked, his voice much softer than it had been when talking to Dustin.

Mrs. Byers nodded. “And El’s okay too.”

Dustin had felt a little awkward standing between the adults who were looking at each other in a way that made Dustin feel sure they’d forgotten he was there. He had slunk back to the living room floor, waking up Lucas and Max in the process.

“Is everything okay?” Lucas had asked groggily.

Dustin had nodded. “Yeah, Hopper says Steve’s gonna be fine.”

Max had taken a deep breath, clearly relieved. “Good.”

The desperation of that night when no one knew for sure if everyone was going to make it or whether or not the Mind Flayer going to come back with his army of demo-dogs contrasted strongly with the relaxed atmosphere of the Byers’s living room after the Snow Ball. The movie played, the boys argued back and forth about little things, everyone was safe.

More than an hour into the film, Jonathan crept in through the front door, trying not to distract the boys from the characters on the screen.

Dustin looked up and saw Jonathan smile first at his brother and then at the movie they’d chosen.

Dustin moved over on the couch and gestured for Jonathan to join them. Jonathan nodded his thanks and sat down next to Dustin.

“You have fun at the dance?” Dustin asked after a moment.

Jonathan started slightly, seeming surprised that Dustin wanted to talk during the movie. Will, Mike, and Lucas down on the floor had been whispering together about plot holes for the last ten minutes so Dustin didn’t feel bad about interrupting anything.

“Yeah, it was pretty fun,” Jonathan answered, a small smile still on his face. “And it looks like you guys all had a good time?”

Dustin nodded. "Nancy's a pretty good dancer," he added.

Jonathan laughed. "Yeah she is; we did some practicing after you all left."

Dustin wrinkled his nose, not wanting to hear too many details about the love lives of his friends' older siblings.

"She said she really liked dancing with you."

Dustin looked up in surprise. "Really?"

Jonathan nodded seriously. "She thinks you're a really sweet kid."

"Aw shucks," Dustin replied, his words only half sarcastic. It was flattering to know what Nancy Wheeler liked him, even if it was just as a sweet kid who was friends with her brother. "Nancy's pretty sweet too."

"Yeah she is." Jonathan sat back on the couch, a contented smile on his face that looked disturbingly similar to the smile that had been on Mike's face all night.

Dustin rolled his eyes for what felt like the millionth time that night. He couldn't deal with all these lame teenagers "in love" or whatever it was. Dustin suddenly felt that same pang of rejection he'd felt at the dance before Nancy had come over to him. He turned to Jonathan but then looked away. Times like these he wished he had an older brother to talk to or get advice from. Instantly Steve's face flashed into his head. Of course. Steve would know how he should feel about the dance and Nancy and lovesick Mike. The older boy already put up with Dustin's ramblings on a regular basis, so adding these new issues into the mix would be easy.

Eventually the boys drifted off to sleep, Mike and Lucas still debating the film in incoherent sentence fragments while their eyes were closed.

The next morning Mrs. Byers made pancakes before she drove all the boys home on her way to work.

"See you at the arcade later!" Dustin called as he left Lucas and Mike

in the car with his friend's mom.

Inside Dustin was questioned thoroughly by his excited mother who wanted to hear every detail about her son's last Snow Ball.

Dustin didn't even want to think about what it would be like when he had to go to Prom in a few years.

"Okay, Mom, okay," Dustin said as he threw his clothing from the day before down in his room. "I'm just going to shower, okay?"

That finally got his mother back to the living room looking around for their new cat.

Dustin grimaced at himself in the mirror. His Steve Harrington hair had not faired well overnight.

Fifteen minutes later he was out of the shower, his hair on its way back to its usual uncontrollably curly self as it dried.

"I'm going to Steve's!" Dustin called out to his mother as he jammed his baseball cap on his head and left the house.

"Have fun!" his mother called back, now fully occupied with her kitten.

The ride to Steve's was one that Dustin had grown familiar with in the past month.

Jonathan and Nancy had taken Dustin, Lucas, and Max to the hospital to visit Steve the morning after the gate was closed. All of them had been exhausted and – to the displeasure of the hospital staff – at least partly covered in sweat, dirt, or slime, but they had needed to make sure that Steve was going to be okay.

"Ugh, you kids almost get me killed and then come to brag about it," Steve had complained from his hospital bed, eyes barely open, the wounds on his head looking far worse in the well-lit hospital room than they had in the dim Byers' living room.

"I'm sorry," Max had said from the back of the group in a small voice.

Instantly, Steve had opened his eyes wider. “No, no it’s not your fault,” he had said quickly, looking directly into Max’s eyes. “I didn’t mean that. I was talking about the dog things in the tunnels.”

“Demo-dogs,” Dustin corrected automatically.

Steve glared at him as much as he could while half his face was under bandages.

The kids had left not long after that, mostly because they all really wanted to get home to change.

In the days after the event, Dustin had biked over to the Harrington’s house almost daily. Steve had been barred from returning to school for a week, so Dustin figured it would be nice for him to have some company.

Steve had complained bitterly about the thirteen-year-old’s visits, but Dustin knew he had secretly enjoyed them.

Once Steve was all patched up, he started volunteering to drive the kids to the arcade or to school, and Dustin knew that despite the act that Steve put on – and the amount of times he referred to the group as “dipshits” or something equally demeaning – the high school senior did actually care about the band of middle schoolers.

Dustin left his bike by the Harrington’s garage and came around through the backdoor, which was unlocked as usual. There was a very small likelihood that Steve’s parents were actually around, and Dustin found he was right to assume that Steve was alone when he walked inside and found the kitchen, den, and living room all empty.

“Hey Steve!” Dustin called as he walked around.

“Damn it,” Dustin heard from upstairs.

Steve groaned as he saw Dustin in his foyer. “Tell me that you at least didn’t bring the whole gang with you too.”

Dustin held up his hands. “It’s just me. And don’t act like you don’t want to hear about the dance.”

Steve looked conflicted for a moment, but then he laughed. “Yeah, kid. You’re right. I was kind of curious.”

Dustin grinned widely at Steve’s admission.

Steve rolled his eyes and moved around Dustin to go into the kitchen, cuffing Dustin around the head affectionately as he passed by.

Steve poured them each a glass of milk and started to make sandwiches, knowing without even asking that Dustin would want one too.

“So how’d it go?” Steve asked after a moment.

Dustin shrugged and sat down on a barstool. “Not so well.”

Steve stopped spreading peanut butter and looked up at his friend, concern etched in his face. “Aw, no. What happened, kid?”

“The whole confidence and not caring thing didn’t really work for me,” Dustin explained.

“Shit, sorry, man,” Steve apologized, passing Dustin a PB&J.

Dustin accepted it with a small smile. “It was okay, I guess. And El came so that was fun – we didn’t have Mike pining after her the whole night.”

Steve laughed at that as he took a bite of his sandwich.

“This whole ‘being in love’ thing seems kind of overrated,” Dustin continued, looking up almost shyly at the closest thing he had to an older brother.

“Totally,” Steve replied, clinking Dustin’s glass with his own. “You guys are way too young to have to deal with all that shit.”

Dustin immediately felt better, grateful to know that even though it seemed like romance had consumed most of his friend group, it didn’t really matter in the long run.

“And who needs to dance with anyone at the Snow Ball anyway,”

Steve continued, reassuringly.

“Actually, I did dance with someone,” Dustin corrected. “Nancy Wheeler.”

Steve looked shocked at the mention of his ex-girlfriend. “Way to go Dustin!” he said, holding his hand up for a high-five.

Dustin slapped it and laughed. “She said she liked me better than the rest of Mike’s friends.”

Steve nodded approvingly, a sad smile on his face. “Nancy Wheeler does have impeccable taste.” He frowned thoughtfully for a moment. “Dancing with Nancy Wheeler at the Snow Ball probably doesn’t hurt your future chances with the middle school ladies either.”

Dustin grinned. He was really *really* glad that Steve had been the first person he’d found when he realized that Dart had turned into a mini-demogorgon.

“You know, Steve,” Dustin started, “I, uh... Well the thing is... I mean...”

“Just spit it out, kid,” Steve interrupted exasperatedly.

“It’s just...” Dustin paused for a moment, collecting himself, before he began again. “I’ve always kind of been jealous of the other guys, you know? Like Will has Jonathan and Mike has Nancy and Holly even though Holly’s little and he and Nancy don’t always get along, and even Lucas has Erica. But me, I’m kind of alone; I don’t even have anyone to fight with. But it’s been cool to, I guess, have an older brother, you know, sort of. Someone who can give me advice and who I can annoy the shit out of. It’s just... kind of cool.” Dustin shrugged and looked at his half eaten sandwich. He didn’t care – just like Steve had taught him.

“Now you’re getting all *mushy* on me, Henderson?” Steve rolled his eyes. “If I’d have known this was coming after saving you assholes, I’d have just let you die at the junkyard or at the Byers’s or down in those fucking tunnels. Jesus Christ.”

Dustin looked up at Steve to retort, but he found that while Steve’s

words were typical of his “I don’t care” attitude, Steve was actually smiling a little bit, though he stopped the second Dustin noticed.

“Hey, you really like hanging with me, too, don’t you?” Dustin’s face spread into a wide grin as he leaned across the counter toward his new friend.

“No, no no no.” Steve backed away from Dustin, his hands out defensively. “Definitely didn’t say that.”

“No, but that smile did!” Dustin argued gleefully.

Steve continued moving away from his young friend, but Dustin got up and followed him around the kitchen laughing uproariously.

Steve finally threw up his hands. “Ugh! Fine! I do think it’s kind of cool to have a little brother. But only kind of!” he added quickly to shut down the excited whoop that was about to come out of Dustin.

Dustin cheered anyway. “Dustin Henderson: danced with Nancy Wheeler at the Snow Ball and best friends with Steve Harrington. Who’d have thought?”

Steve shook his head but he smiled to himself anyway. “Yeah, kid, who’d have ever thought.”

Author’s Note:

Thanks for reading!

Comments and Kudos are so appreciated <3